

Chasing a Hat

By C. B. Lewis

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Arnold Thompson, bachelor of forty, was bored. He was bored because the warm weather had come, and he must go away to some resort; because he had to buy a new straw hat; because he had tried the roof gardens and they had offered nothing new; because he had indolently tried to flirt with a good looking girl that day on the street and she had exhibited her contempt; because of a dozen other reasons belonging to bachelorhood.

When Arnold Thompson bought a hat it was an event. He argued that the fate of a nation depended on the appearance of that hat when placed on his head, and he was therefore a full hour in making his selection. It was an hour of anxiety to him and an hour of misery to the salesman who waited on him. On this day, however—on this day when he strolled into his hatter's and made his wants known something out of the ordinary was to happen. The bachelor had tried on only nineteen different hats and had posed before the glass only nineteen different times, when he made a discovery under the sweatband of the nineteenth hat. It was a slip of paper, and on it was written in a feminine hand:

If the buyer of this hat is a single man and a gentleman, he may write to Genevieve Burton.

No address was added, and as the bachelor held the slip in his hand a thrill of romance began to creep into his soul. That's what he had been yearning for for years—romance. He had had it from twenty to thirty, but lost it from thirty to forty and came to the conclusion that his heart never could be stirred again.

"If the buyer of this hat is a single man"—

Well, he was single. He was not only single, but called rather good looking, and he had a fairly good income.

—“and a gentleman”—

Well, he was a gentleman, and no one could be found to dispute the fact. What should follow? He would write to Genevieve Burton. The name pleased him as he stood there with the hat in one hand and he called up a form. He had no business to ask Genevieve good looking, curly haired or willowy, but he assumed the responsibility and said to the salesman, much to the latter's surprise:

"I'll take this hat."

"But is it a good fit?"

"I said I would take this hat. Send it home."

As a matter of fact, the hat was not a good fit, and the bachelor had meant to paw over at least nineteen others, but it struck him that he must have the hat as well as the slip of paper found beneath its sweatband. The two naturally went together.

As soon as he reached his club he sat down to write to Genevieve. He found it a hard task. She was a braider of straw hats; she lived far away; she was innocent hearted; she couldn't be invited to take a ride in his auto or to accompany him to the theater and dinner; she was a coy, shy country bluebird and must not be startled. The bachelor started three different letters and abandoned them and then suddenly discovered that he had no address to write to. But why write at all? Why not chase that hat down until the fair braider was discovered?

A decision was reached in an instant, and half an hour later the man was back at the hat store asking where the hat was made. He was referred to a wholesale dealer. The dealer said that the hat was part of a small stock bought at auction and referred him to an auctioneer. The auctioneer looked his books over and took his time about it and then "reckoned" it was a Smith hat.

The investigation thus far had consumed ten days, but Arnold Thompson had rather enjoyed them. The detective instinct is more or less strong in the character of every man, and when romance is mingled with it it becomes even more fascinating.

The bachelor flattered himself that he was a student of human nature and that he could get an insight into a person's character through his chirography. He sized Genevieve up as warm hearted, trusting, hopeful and high minded. She probably had been born and reared in affluence, but owing to her father's too extensive speculations in the Texas oil fields, where there was no oil, she had been obliged to turn to straw hats to make a living. It was a shame, and he sympathized with her from the bottom of his heart. He had always said that he wouldn't marry, but—

Arnold Thompson went to Dunbury. He visited every hatter in the hat town, but all went back on the hat. He was told that it might have been made in

any one of half a dozen places they mentioned, and the only thing to do was to give up further thought of Genevieve or pursue his quest.

He decided at once to pursue. He always had been flattered by women running after him; now he was running after one of the opposite sex, and there was something novel in the change. He went to Massachusetts and was sent on to Vermont. There they sent him over into Canada, and he reached Canada to be told that Michigan was his likely field.

This occupied a full month. The bachelor did not travel by lightning

express. He stopped on the way to think of Genevieve and take his Turkish baths and get his nails manicured. He got around to Michigan at last, however. He had no sooner set eyes on the Maumee river at Toledo than he began to be hopeful. During the ride of eighty miles to Detroit he saw many cattails and much marsh grass and other things of which straw hats are made, and his hopes continued to increase.

Arriving at the City of the Straits, the bachelor located the only hat factory in town and then went to his hotel to make ready for an interview on the morrow. He was alternating between fear and hope when a drummer with whom he fell in reached for his hat in the familiar way drummers have on two minutes' acquaintance and looked it over and said:

"Once in awhile one of you New York fellows shows a little common sense in articles of dress."

"How do you mean?"

"This is the best straw hat made, and it was made right here in this little burg."

That settled it, and a bland and complacent smile broke over the face of the bachelor. He could forgive the innuendo because his long chase was at last ended. In the language of Sherlock Holmes, he had run his quarry to earth, and the morrow would bring a crisis. Mr. Arnold Thompson realized that he was off on a tangent. He had the reputation of being a cool and imperturbable fellow, one who never lost his head about women, but he had to acknowledge that he had made a fool of himself in this affair—that is, all his friends would say so. He had some excuses for his own ear, and if they were not sufficient he wasn't going to admit the fact.

At 10 o'clock the next morning the bachelor started for the hat factory. He intended to walk right in and talk about hats and perhaps pass himself off as a retailer. It was a small concern, employing only about half a dozen women to sew the braid purchased somewhere else. The business office and the workshop were in one, and the romancer entered to find a woman about forty years old in charge. She explained that the boss had just stepped out and asked what was wanted.

Mr. Thompson began to talk about hats, and he was making slow work of it when one of the girls came forward and said to the woman:

"Excuse me, Mrs. Burton, but am I sewing this right?"

"Are you Genevieve Burton?" asked the bachelor as she turned to him again.

"I am," she replied as she tried to blush.

"You—you wrote your name and slipped it behind the sweatband of this hat?"

"I did, sir."

"What was your object?"

"Just a trick of the trade. I am paid \$2 a week extra for that. That's why we call it the 'Romance' hat. We have sent out 12,000 hats, and every one has my name in. Has it given you a backache to find out where the hat was made?"

"Never again, Genevieve—never again will I believe in woman or romance!" exclaimed Arnold Thompson in his most tragic tones. And an hour later he was fleeing the town and trying to make himself believe that he was traveling to broaden his ideas on his own country.

A NEW YEAR ADVENTURE

(Original.)

It was the first day of the year. The wind was blowing icy cold, driving the snow into drifts. A dead leaf here and there dancing on a naked branch was all that was left to remind one of the verdure that had once covered the landscape.

A traveler on horseback was making his way through the snow, vainly endeavoring to keep his cloak wrapped about him, the wind struggling equally to tear it from him. He was looking about him for a place of shelter, for the days were short and the sun had just set at half past 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Coming to an imposing house standing in large grounds far back from the road, he turned his horse's head between two pillars and entered. He had traversed but half the distance to the house when the front door opened and a man stepped out whose rapier, feathered hat and broad lace collar betokened a cavalier. Descending the steps, he quickly came on between the great trees that lined

the way as if bent on some errand of importance. As he approached the traveler he scarcely seemed to notice him.

The latter drew rein and said:

"A happy New Year to you, sir."

The man stopped, glared, half drew his rapier, replaced it and was passing on when the stranger added:

"Can I get shelter in yonder house?"

"There is no one there except a woman, and she has not been used to waiting even on herself."

"Where are the men?"

"One of them is before you; the other—well, the other was one too many, and he has gone away."

"You speak in riddles, sir. Do you think the woman, or rather the lady, will be obliged to remain the night alone?"

"Mayhap she will."

"Possibly then she may be glad of the protection even of a stranger."

"You had best go on and find out for yourself."

He showed no disposition to further converse and passed on, the stranger continuing his journey toward the house. On reaching the porch he threw the reins on his horse's neck, and in another moment a loud rap on the knocker indicated his presence. No one replied to his summons, and he knocked again and again, still with no reply. He turned and looked at the flying snow, shivered and, turning again, tried the door. It was unfastened. Entering, he passed through a broad hall and was about to go up the winding staircase when in one of the rooms he saw a woman sitting at a table, her head resting in her hands, her elbows on the table. Surely the man she had met was right. She was a lady and one endowed with a refined beauty. She looked straight before her and seemed no more interested in the stranger than the other had been.

"Madam," he said.

She did not turn her eyes, and he tried again to secure her attention.

"Madam, I crave your pardon for entering unannounced. I am a weary traveler and would gladly rest for the night under your roof. I met a gentleman without who told me you were alone. May I not serve as a protector?"

The woman now for the first time noticed him. Turning her eyes slowly upon him, she said:

"You are welcome to stay here, but not as my protector. I shall need no protector."

Whether she forgot his presence or not, she paid no further attention to him. He began to think that he had stumbled on a haunted house; that the man he had met and this woman were not flesh and blood, but the wraiths of departed occupants of what was now a deserted house. However, having received permission to remain overnight, he went out and stabled his horse, giving him a feed; then, returning to the house, went to the kitchen, where he found sufficient cooked food to furnish him a supper. Having eaten, he went again to the room where the lady had been sitting. She was not there.

A fire was ready on the hearth, and, taking the flint from the mantel, the traveler put sparks to it, then lighted a lamp and sat down at the table. There were books on it, and he tried to read, but wonder prevented, and somehow he wished the lady, be she ghost or flesh, would relieve his loneliness. Then he fell to thinking what had become of her.

Might she not be off her head, and if so she should not be left alone? He resolved to go and seek her. Taking a candle, he went through all the rooms on the ground floor and, not finding her, mounted the staircase. On reaching the floor above he called:

"Madam!"

The only answer was in his imagination, which created myriads of responses. He would have turned and retraced his steps, but wonder spurred him on. He explored one bedroom after another and at last came to one in which his dim candle showed him a figure on the floor. He shuddered lest it be the lady, but it was no woman lying there. Lowering the candle, it showed him the dead body of a man with a fresh sword thrust in the chest.

With a cry, the stranger fled from the room and the house. Getting out his horse, he rode to an inn, where he spent the rest of the night. A few days later in the city he read in a morning newspaper how Sir Richard Clyde, a country baronet, returning from the city on New Year's day after having seen the old year out with a party of convivial friends, found there one Herbert Steele, his wife's former lover. There had been a murder, after which Sir Richard gave himself up. Lady Clyde had disappeared.

F. A. MITCHEL.

Qualified.

"What! You marry my daughter," thundered old Roxley, "you, a mere clerk!"

"No, sir," replied young Hunter, "not a clerk, but a gentleman now. I resigned my job the moment your daughter accepted me."—Philadelphia Press.

Hardly.

Hicks—I understand somebody has discovered that there's alcohol in root beer. Wicks—Yes, but there's no fear of any old whisky drinker adopting it for a substitute.—Philadelphia Ledger.

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